

# Excerpts, Vol. 1



Liam O'Flaherty

From:

The Magic Christian, by Terry Southern

To The Innermost, by Margaret Anderson

Heliogabalus, by H. L. Mencken

Against This Age, by Maxwell Bodenheim

Darwinisms, by Charles Darwin

From A Southern Porch, by Dorothy Scarborough

People You Know, by Harold Stark

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The Seven Stairs, by Stuart Brent

The Dragon in Shallow Waters, by Vita Sackville-West

from *The Magic Christian*, by Terry Southern (1960)  
Project Gutenberg etext

His arrival was fairly propitious; the production in dress rehearsal at that moment was called *\_All Our Yesterdays\_*, a drama which, according to the sponsors, was to be, concerning certain emotions and viewpoints, more or less *\_definitive\_*.

Beginning with this production, Grand made it a point that he or his representative contact the hero or heroine of each play, while it was still in rehearsal, and reach some sort of understanding about final production. A million was generally sufficient.

The arrangement between Grand and the leading actress of *\_All Our Yesterdays\_* was simplicity itself. During final production, that is to say, the Sunday-night nation-wide presentation of the play, and at the top of her big end-of-the-second-act scene, the heroine suddenly turned away from the other players, approached the camera, and addressed the viewers, point-blank:

“Anyone who would allow this slobbering pomp and drivell in his home has less sense and taste than the beasts of the field!”

Then she pranced off the set.

Half the remaining actors turned to stare after her in amazement, while the others sat frozen in their last attitudes. There was a frenzy of muffled whispers coming from off-stage:

“What the hell!”

“Cue! Cue!”

“\_Fade it! For Christ’s sake, fade it!\_”

Then there was a bit of commotion before it was actually faded—one of the supporting actors had been trained in Russian methods and thought he could improvise the rest of the play, about twelve minutes, so there were one or two odd lines spoken by him in this attempt before the scene jerkily faded to blackness. A short documentary film about tarpon fishing was put on to fill out the balance of the hour.

The only explanation was that the actress had been struck by insanity;

but even so, front-office temper ran high.

On the following Sunday, the production, *Tomorrow's Light*, took an unexpected turn while the leading actor, in the role of an amiable old physician, was in the midst of an emergency operation. His brow was knit in concern and high purpose, as the young nurse opposite watched his face intently for a sign.

"Dr. Lawrence," she said, "do you ... do you think you can save Dr. Chester's son?"

Without relaxing his features, the doctor smiled, a bit grimly it seemed, before raising his serious brown eyes to her own.

"I'm afraid it isn't a question of saving *him*, Miss Nurse—I only wish it were—it's a question of saving my dinner."

The nurse evidenced a questioning look, just concealing the panic beneath it (for he had missed his cue!), so, laying aside his instruments, he continued, as in explanation:

"Yes, you see, I really think if I speak one more line of this drivel I'll lose my dinner." He nodded gravely at the table, "... vomit right into that incision I've made." He slowly drew off his rubber gloves, regarding the astonished nurse as he did so with mild indignation.

"Perhaps that would be *your* idea of a pleasant Sunday evening, Miss Nurse," he said reproachfully. "Sorry, it *isn't* mine!" And he turned and strode off the set.

The third time something like this happened, the producer and sponsor were very nearly out of their minds. Of course they suspected that a rival company was tampering with the productions, bribing the actors and so on. Security measures were taken. Directors were fired right and left. Rehearsals were held behind locked doors, and there was an attempt to keep the actors under constant surveillance, but ... Grand always seemed to get in there somehow, with the old convincer.

In the aftermath, some of the actors paid the breach-of-contract fine of twenty-five or fifty thousand; others pleaded temporary insanity; still others gained a lot of publicity by taking a philosophic stand, saying that it was true, they had been overcome with nausea at that drivel, and that they themselves were too sensitive and serious for it, had too much integrity, moral fiber, etc....

It became the talk of the industry; the rating soared—but somehow it looked bad. Finally the producer and the sponsor of the show were put on the carpet before Mr. Harlan, the tall and distinguished head of the network.

“Listen,” he said to the sponsor as he paced the office, “we want your business, Mr. Levet, don’t get me wrong—but if you guys can’t control that show of yours ... well, I mean \_goddamn\_ it, what’s going on over there?” He turned to the producer now, who was a personal friend of his: “For Christ’s sake, Max, can’t you get together a \_show\_, and put it on the way it’s supposed to be without any somersaults? ... is \_that\_ so hard to do?... I mean \_we\_ can’t have this sort of thing going on, \_you\_ know that, Max, we \_simply\_ cannot have....”

“Listen, Al,” said the producer, a short fat man who rose up and down on his toes, smiling, as he spoke, “we got the highest Trendex in the books right now.”

“Max, goddamn it, I’d have the FCC down on my neck in another week—\_you\_ can’t schedule one kind of hour—have something go haywire every time and fill out with something else.... I mean what the \_hell\_ you got over there ... \_two\_ shows or \_one\_, for Christ’s sake!”

“We got the top Trendex in the biz, Al.”

“There are some goddamn things that are against the law, Max, and that kind of stuff you had going out last week, that ‘\_I pity the moron whose life is so empty he would look at this\_,’ and that kind of crap \_cannot\_ go out over the air\_! Don’t you understand that? It’s not \_me\_, Max, you know that. I wouldn’t give a goddamn if you had a ... a \_mule\_ up there throwing it to some hot broad, I only wish we could, for Christ’s sake—but there \_is\_ a question of lawful procedure\_ and....”

“How about if it’s ‘healthy satire of the media,’ Al?”

“... and—\_what?\_”

“We got the top of the book, Al.”

“Wait a minute....”

“We got it, Al.”

“Wait a minute, Max, I’m thinking, for Christ’s sake ... ‘healthy satire of the media’ .... \_It’s\_ an angle, \_it’s\_ an angle. Jones might buy it ... Jones at the FCC ... if I could get to him first ... he’s stupid enough to buy it. Okay, it’s an angle, Max—that’s all I can say right now ... it’s an angle.”

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from To The Innermost, by Margaret Anderson,  
in the Project Gutenberg etext of  
The Little Review - October 1914

The popular translation of that dangerous term, individualism, is "selfishness." Self-dependence is a pompous phrase, and self-completion a huge negation. The average mind seems never to grasp the fact that individualism and democracy are synonymous terms; that self-dependence is merely the first of one's intricate obligations to his universe, and self-completion the first step toward that wider consciousness which makes the giving-out of self valuable.

I am always feeling that some one will point out to me, with the most embarrassing justice, the obviousness of observations like these. But invariably, after a resolve to keep to those high levels which stretch out beyond the boundaries of the accepted, some one engages me in a discussion--some one who still believes in the antique theory that life proceeds for the sake of immortality, or that a woman must choose between her charm and the ballot; and I emerge therefrom convinced that the highest mission in life is the dedication of oneself to the obvious, and that a valiant preaching of truisms is the only way to get at the root of intellectual evils. It has its fascinations, besides: to convince a reactionary (not that I've ever done it) that renunciation is not an ultimate end, or that truth is a good thing for all people, is better than discovering a kindred soul. And so I proceed, without further apology: that human being is of most use to other people who has first become of most use to himself.

It is the war that has emphasized so overwhelmingly the triviality of trivial things. Out of such utter dehumanization one has a vision of the race which might emerge--a race purified of small struggles, small causes, small patriotisms; a race animated by those big impulses which have always made up the dreams of men. And then would come the more subtle personal development: a race of human units purged of small ideals and ambitions, cleansed to the point where education can at least proceed with economy--that is, without having to destroy two ounces of superstition to produce one ounce of knowledge. And at the foundation of

such a race structure, I believe, will be a corner stone of Individualism--or whatever you may choose to call it. What it means is very simple: it is a matter of heightened inner life.

Our culture--or what little we have of such a thing--is clogged by masses of dead people who have no conscious inner life. The man who asked, "Did you ever see an old artist?" put a profound question. People get old because they have no vision. And they have no vision because they have no inner life. Of course, any sort of inner life is impossible to the man or woman who must be a slave instead of a human being. And this brings us, of course, to a discussion of economic emancipation--which I shall not take advantage of; because I want to talk here not of what the individual should have done for him, but of what he might very well do for himself. There are so many slaves whose bondage can be traced to no cause except their refusal or their inability to come to life; and the significance of the fact that spiritual resourcefulness is most rare among those persons who have the most leisure to cultivate it need not be emphasized even in an article devoted to the apparent.

Human weakness is reducible to so many causes beside that much-abused one of "circumstance." We talk so much nonsense about people not being able to help themselves. The truth is that people can help themselves out of nine-tenths of all the trouble they get into. (We'll leave the other tenth to circumstance.) If they could only be made to realize this, or that if they are helped out by some one else they might as well stay in trouble! To be dragged out is more desirable than starving to death, because it is more sensible, and because people are so sentimental in their attitude toward receiving that one welcomes almost any emergency which drives them to accepting aid with grace and honesty: \_anything\_ to teach a man that he need not smirk about taking what he himself would like to give without being smirked at! But in spite of this, one must help himself to anything which is to be of positive value to him; and must learn that personality gets what it demands. However, this begins to sound like a pamphlet from East Aurora....

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from Heliogabalus, by H. L. Mencken  
via the Project Gutenberg etext

LUCIA

[ In a faint voice ] I am cold.

HELIOGABALUS

[ \_Uncertainly\_ ] I was just coming out to--

LUCIA

[ \_Catching sight of the wives\_ --PAULA \_in the middle of the floor in her chemise and the other three in bed--she gives a scream and totters toward the centre of the stage. There she does a grand faint at \_ PAULA'S \_feet\_ ]

PAULA

[ \_Leaping back\_ ] Oh, my God!

HELIOGABALUS

[ \_Solemnly\_ ] You have killed her. She has frozen to death.

PAULA

[ \_Alarmed\_ ] I did nothing of the sort. She went out of her own free will.

AQUILIA

[ \_Jumping from bed\_ ] Get her into bed, quick!

HELIOGABALUS

[ \_Reaching down and grabbing her under the arms\_ ] Get her into \_my\_ bed.

[ \_The other wives pile out, and help\_ PAULA \_and\_ HELIOGABALUS \_to carry her to his bed\_ ]

PAULA

[ \_Snivelling\_ ] I wouldn't have hurt her for the world.

HELIOGABALUS

Tell Rufinius to get those two doctors I pardoned.

[PAULA, \_still in her chemise, rushes to the door, flings it open and exits\_]

CÆLESTIS

Rub her wrists.

ANNIA

Have you a key? Try a key at the back of her neck.

HELIOGABALUS

Cover her up!

AQUILIA

Try massaging her ears.

HELIOGABALUS

Go get some water.

[AQUILIA \_rushes to the door, flinging it open just in time to admit\_ PISO \_and\_ POLORUS. \_They come in at a gallop, followed by\_ RUFINIUS, PAULA \_and a slave pushing a wheeled table covered with huge bottles, rolls of plasters, etc. The scene must move at lightning speed\_]

PISO

[\_Idiotically, in great excitement\_] Which is the patient? [\_He looks from one wife to another, and then observes\_ LUCIA \_on the bed\_] Ah!

POLORUS

[\_Crowding to the front\_] Pass me the brandy.

PISO



Brandy? On what theory?

POLORUS

This is no time for theories, idiot! The patient needs help.

PISO

Well, how are you going to help her until you establish the diagnosis?

POLORUS

What could be plainer? A horse-doctor could see that she has fainted.

[\_He proceeds to pour out a large drink of the brandy\_]

PISO

[\_Very learnedly\_] Suppose it is \_coma\_? Suppose she has been  
\_poisoned\_?

[PAULA \_gives a shriek\_]

POLORUS

Nonsense! Then where is your cyanosis?

[\_He proceeds to lift\_ LUCIA'S \_head and pour some of the  
brandy into her mouth\_]

PISO

Stop! I forbid it!

[\_During this rapid dialogue the three other wives flutter about,  
and\_ HELIOGABALUS \_and\_ PAULA \_crowd close to the  
bed\_]

POLORUS

[\_Continuing with the brandy\_] I stand on my Hippocratic oath. I insist  
on the brandy.

PISO

I appeal to your decency. Don't kill the patient. [PAULA  
\_screams again\_] Let me feel her pulse.

POLORUS

Stand back! You are suffocating her!

HELIOGABALUS

[\_Losing patience\_] Here, fools! Give me the goblet.

[\_He seizes it and pours half of its contents down\_ LUCIA'S \_throat.  
She gasps, coughs, gags and then gradually sits up. As she opens her  
eyes she sights\_ PAULA]

LUCIA

[\_An exclamation of terror\_] Oh! Oh! Take her away!

[PAULA \_hops back in great confusion\_]

PAULA

[\_Ingratiatingly\_] Don't be afraid, dearie.

LUCIA

[\_Screams\_] She tried to stab me!

PAULA

[\_In great excitement\_] The idea! I never did anything--

LUCIA

I can see the devil standing behind her!

[PAULA \_swings about quickly to look behind her, loses her balance,  
throws up her arms, and falls down with a crash\_]

PAULA

Help!

POLORUS

[\_ Rushing to the rescue\_] Brandy! Brandy!

[\_ A great hub-bub. The wives crowd around\_]

PISO

[\_ Shrilly, over the tumult\_] I forbid it!

HELIOGABALUS

Give her air!

[POLORUS \_applies the brandy jug to\_ PAULA'S \_lips and she begins to gurgle, gag and blubber\_]

PAULA

[\_ Still gasping, and rising to a sitting position on the floor\_] That Christian tried to put a spell on me. She has the evil eye.

LUCIA

[\_ Shrilly, from the bed\_] There \_are\_ devils in her! She is like the Gadarene swine.

PAULA

[\_ Struggling to her feet, assisted by the doctors, the other wives and\_ HELIOGABALUS] Liar!

LUCIA

She is possessed by demons, Cæsar.

PAULA

[\_ Again in great fright\_] Let me out of here! I feel something coming over me!

AQUILIA

I feel it, too. I--I--

[\_ She flops across the big bed.\_ POLORUS \_leaps to the rescue with the brandy-jug, but as he reaches her she sits up and knocks it out of his hand\_]

PISO

[\_ Prancing about\_] Where is the ammonia? Who has the ammonia bottle?

[\_ He searches for it on the wheeled table, but can't find it\_]

PAULA

Let me out! Let me out!

POLORUS

Ammonia your grandmother! Where are the sedatives? Who took the poppy-water? Where is the poppy-water?

[\_ He makes a wild search for it\_]

HELIOGABALUS

[\_ Quietly\_] I think you're right. They need something to calm their nerves. [\_ He finds and seizes the bottle\_] Ah, here it is! Ammonia would half kill them.

PISO

I protest!

PAULA

I want to get out of here.

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## NIGHTMARE AND SOMETHING DELICATE

from *Against This Age*, by Maxwell Bodenheim

via Project Gutenberg's etext

You mutter, with your face  
Pleading for more room because  
It has scanned a panorama:  
You mutter, with every difference  
On your face an error in size  
Mesmerized by the sight of a sky-line:  
“Life is a nightmare and something delicate.”  
Lady, they have made a world for you,  
And if you dare to leave it  
They will flagellate you  
With the bones of dead men’s thoughts,  
And five senses, five termagants  
Snapping at the uneasy mind.  
“No, five riotous flirts,”  
You say, “and each one has  
A thick blandishment to master the mind.”  
Yes, lady, through the bold disarrangement of words  
Life acquires with great foresight  
An interesting nervousness.  
But O lady with a decadent music  
Somehow silent in lines of flesh,  
Finding your face too small,  
Finding the earth too small,  
Have they not informed you  
That crowding life into seven words  
Is an insincere and minor epigram?  
And have they not reprimanded you  
Because you fail to observe  
Their vile and fervent spontaneity,  
These howlers of earthly shrouds?  
And have they neglected to drive  
The bluster of their knuckles against your face  
Because you rush from the leg and arm  
Anecdotes of microscopical towns,  
Bandyng with a fantasy  
Which they call thin and valueless?  
“Life is a nightmare and something delicate,”  
You repeat, and then, “O yes, they have done these things

To me because I take not seriously  
The interval between two steps  
Made by Death, who has grown a little tired.  
When Death recovers his vigor  
The intervals will become  
Shorter and shorter until  
No more men are alive.  
But now they have their chance.  
The wild, foul fight of life  
Delights in refreshing phrases--  
Swift-pouring tranquillities and ecstasies  
Atoning for the groaning stampede  
That desecrates the light  
Between each dawn and twilight.  
And those who stand apart  
Use the edged art of their minds  
To cut the struggling pack of bodies  
Into naked, soiled distinctness.”  
Lady, do not let them hear you.  
You are too delicate--  
Deliberately, nimbly, remotely, strongly  
Delicate--and you will remind them  
Too much of Death, who is also  
The swiftly fantastic compression  
Of every adjective and adverb  
Marching to nouns that live  
Beyond the intentions of men.  
Men are not able, lady,  
To strike his face, and in vengeance  
They will smear your face  
With the loose, long hatred of their words.  
I will wash your face  
With new metaphors and similes,  
Telling carefully with my hands  
That I love you not for your skin,  
And every bird at twilight  
Will be enviously astonished  
At your face now insubstantial  
Indeed, you have an irony  
That ironically doubts  
Whether its power is supreme,  
And at such times you accept  
The adequate distraction  
Of cold and shifting fantasy.

This is your mood and mine,  
And with it we open the window  
To look upon the night.  
The night, with distinguished coherence,  
Is saying yes to the soul  
And mending its velvet integrity  
Torn by one forlorn  
Animal that bounds  
From towns and villages.  
The night is Blake in combat  
With an extraordinary wolf  
Whose head can take the mobile  
Protection of a smile;  
Whose heart contains the ferocious  
Lies of ice and fire;  
Whose heart with stiff and sinuous  
Promises swindles the lips and limbs of men;  
Whose heart persuades its confusion  
To welcome the martyred certainties  
Of cruelty and kindness;  
Whose brain is but a calmness  
Where the falsehoods of earth  
Can fashion masks of ideas.  
Welcome the wolf.  
Bring lyrics to fondle his hair.  
Summon your troops of words  
And exalt his gasping contortions.  
Lady, it is my fear  
That makes me give you these commands.  
Men will force upon you  
The garland of their spit  
If you fail to glorify,  
Or eagerly disrobe,  
The overbearing motives of their flesh.  
And every irony of yours  
Will be despised unless  
A hand of specious warmth  
Directs the twist of your blades.  
O lady, you are flashing detachment  
Clad in exquisitely careful  
Fantasy, and on your face  
Pity and irony unite  
To form the nimble light of contemplations.  
Men will dread you as they fear

Death, the Ultimate Preciosity.  
Stay with me within this chamber  
And tell me that your heart  
Is near to a spiral of pain  
Curving perfectly  
From the squirming of a world.  
See, you have made me luminous  
With this news, and my heart,  
Fighting to be original,  
Ends its struggle in yours.  
Turning, we trace a crescent  
Of conscious imagination  
Upon the darkness of this room.  
Night and window still remain.  
Night, spiritual acrobat,  
Evades with great undulations  
The moans and exultations of men.  
His madly elastic invitation  
To the souls of men  
Gathers up the imagination  
Of one poet, starving in a room  
Where rats and scandals ravish the light.  
With conscious combinations of words  
The poet bounds through space with Night.  
Together they observe  
The bleeding, cheated mob  
Of bodies robbed by one quick thrill.  
Cold, exact, and fanciful,  
They drop the new designs of words  
Upon a vastly obvious contortion.  
Poet and night can see  
No difference between  
The peasant, groveling and marred,  
And smoother men who cringe more secretly.  
Yet they give these men  
The imaginary distinctions of words.  
Compassionate poet and night.  
You say: "With glaring details  
Attended by the voices of men,  
Morning will attack the poet.  
Men will brandish adjectives.  
Tenuous! Stilted! Artificial!  
Dreams of warm permanence  
Will grasp the little weapons



Furnished by the servant-mind.  
Dreams ... ah, lady, let us leave  
The more precise and polished dream  
Of our sadness, and surpass  
The scoundrel, beggar, fool, and braggart  
Fused into a loose convulsion  
Called by men amusement.  
Laughter is the explosive trouble  
Of a soul that shakes the flesh.  
Misunderstanding the signal  
Men fly to an easy delight.  
Causes, obscure and oppressed,  
Cleave the flesh and become  
Raped by earthly intentions.  
Thus the surface rôles of men  
Throw themselves upon the stranger,  
Changing his cries with theirs.  
The aftermath is a smile  
Relishing the past occurrence.  
Lady, since you desire  
To clutch the meaning of this sound and pause,  
Laugh and smile with me more sadly  
And with that attenuated, cold  
Courage never common to men.  
Another window is behind us,  
Needing much our laugh and smile.

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ORIGIN OF THE DOG.  
from the Project Gutenberg etext of  
Darwinisms, by Charles Darwin  
Nathan Sheppard, Editor

[Animals and  
Plants under

The first and chief point of interest in this chapter is, whether the numerous domesticated varieties of the dog have descended from a single wild species, or from several. Some authors believe that all have descended from the wolf, or from the jackal, or from an unknown and extinct species. Others again believe, and this of late has been the favorite tenet, that they have descended from several species, extinct and recent, more or less commingled together. We shall probably never be able to ascertain their origin with certainty. Paleontology does not throw much light on the question, owing, on the one hand, to the close similarity of the skulls of extinct as well as living wolves and jackals, and owing, on the other hand, to the great dissimilarity of the skulls of the several breeds of the domestic dogs. It seems, however, that remains have been found in the later tertiary deposits more like those of a large dog than of a wolf, which favors the belief of De Blainville that our dogs are the descendants of a single extinct species. On the other hand, some authors go so far as to assert that every chief domestic breed must have had its wild prototype. This latter view is extremely improbable: it allows nothing for variation; it passes over the almost monstrous character of some of the breeds; and it almost necessarily assumes that a large number of species have become extinct since man domesticated the dog; whereas we plainly see that wild members of the dog-family are extirpated by human agency with much difficulty; even so recently as 1710 the wolf existed in so small an island as Ireland.

\* \* \* \*

At a period between four and five thousand years ago, various breeds--viz., pariah dogs, greyhounds, common hounds, mastiffs, house-dogs, lap-dogs, and turnspits--existed, more or less closely resembling our present breeds. But there is not sufficient evidence that any of these ancient dogs belonged to the same identical sub-varieties with our present dogs. As long as man was believed to have existed on this earth only about six thousand years, this fact of the great diversity of the breeds at so early a period was an argument of much weight that they had proceeded from several wild sources, for there would not have been sufficient time for their divergence and modification. But now that we know, from the discovery of flint tools imbedded with the remains of extinct animals, in districts which have

since undergone great geographical changes, that man has existed for an incomparably longer period, and bearing in mind that the most barbarous nations possess domestic dogs, the argument from insufficient time falls away greatly in value.

[Page 26.]

From this resemblance of the half-domesticated dogs in several countries to the wild species still living there--from the facility with which they can often be crossed together--from even half-tamed animals being so much valued by savages--and from the other circumstances previously remarked on which favor their domestication, it is highly probable that the domestic dogs of the world are descended from two well-defined species of wolf (viz., *C. lupus* and *C. latrans*), and from two or three other doubtful species (namely, the European, Indian, and North African wolves); from at least one or two South American canine species; from several races or species of jackal; and perhaps from one or more extinct species.

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from From A Southern Porch (1919)  
by Dorothy Scarborough  
via the Internet Archive etext

During the summer I am a porcher. My occupation is not so bad as it sounds, however, being not at all burglarious, for I am not a climber but a sitter. During the long, delightful summer, I do nothing but sit on a porch by the side of the road and watch the world go by, what time I am not lying on a swinging couch. The verb porch, not yet included in Sir James Murray's otherwise complete English dictionary, means to live on a porch. According to etymological analogy, it is an impeccably constructed word, and a porcher is one who lives on a porch. Compare it with farmer, rancher, scholar, and so forth, and you will recognize its right to existence. Porching may seem to some a parlous task, an occupation inactive, devoid of thrills, but not so to me. It has its joys for those who know to snatch them and personally, I've always been considered a pretty good snatcher!

I must porch steadily in the summer, because it is only in vacations that I may indulge in this enterprise dear to my body and my soul. In fall, winter, and spring, my life is very different, delightful, it is true, but antipodic to this. At those seasons I live elsewhere, on a certain densely, highly, and variously populated island, but I do not think of it as my home. My real home could never be a place where one sits decorously inside steam-heated - or worse still, not steam-heated walls. My soul cries out for porches, for rocking chairs and white dresses, for the wide spaces of old Virginia gardens. Oh, those gardens of old Virginia, -how their beauty wrings my heart ! Porching, in the real sense of the word, cannot be done in the gregarious rockers on hotel piazzas, where idle women crochet industriously and embroider linen and the truth about their neighbors. On the contrary, it is a high calling apart. In the South the porch is the true center of the home, around which life flows on gently and graciously, with an open reserve, a charming candor. One does not stay inside the house more than is absolutely necessary, for all such pleasant occupations as eating and sleeping, reading, studying, working, and entertaining one's friends are carried on on some companionable piazza or other. There are porches to meet all needs, all moods, and all hours. As the sun travels, one migrates from porch to porch, though there are some widely shaded verandas that are inhabitable at all times. With numberless porches upstairs and down, one can always find solitude if one wishes, or discover some congenial soul to talk or be silent with .

In the South, when a person plans a home, he first builds a porch, and then if he has any money left, he adds few or more rooms according to his needs, but the porch is the essential thing. One college professor that I know, who had only a limited sum with which to build a home, insisted that he must have at least a bathroom in addi-

tion to his veranda, all other quarters being, if necessary , dispensable. But the rise in contractors' prices, with no corresponding elevation of professorial salaries, had reduced him to the necessity of relinquishing either the one or the other. Since he could not have a bathroom and a porch, he said he would put his bathtub on his porch . Even so, he would have a home, for while in New York every man's house is his prison, in the South every man's porch is his home.

The public porch is an ancient thing, but the private affair as part of the dwelling-house, is modern . The earliest porticoes are said by the encyclopedia to be the two at the Tavern of the Winds at Athens, and there would seem to have been some at the entrance to Diomedes' villa outside the Pompeiian gate, though in Rome (so my reference friend asserts) they were probably not allowed. No wonder Rome fell ! We know that the glory of Greek culture was due to the fact that teaching was done by means of affable conversation on porches, as students and philosopher strolled up and down. How much less onerous would learning be to- day if our colleges pursued such plans ! There were porches attached to the early churches, which explains why people went to church oftener then than now.

But curiously enough , the public porch has disappeared, and the home- porch risen among us. It remained for the moderns to construct verandas to houses where people live, since it is only the moderns who know how to live comfortably and agreeably .

It has been said that in the old days piazzas had not been invented because people had no leisure, but that we of to- day are wealthy and inventive enough to spend our time in happy loafing. Ancient and medieval life lacked many of the fine points of knowing how to live, and piazzas were among their greatest deprivations. I am joyful that I was not born in a porchless age. It is pleasing, also, to remember that the household porch as we have it now , is an American invention , a distinctively American institution , a product

of our hospitality and our craving for the unrestricted outlook, the far gaze upon life. What bliss to live in the open, with a floor to protect one from the damp and the dust, and a roof to ward off obtrusive rain and sun ! Walls are nonessential, pure encumbrances to real living, the outgrowth of effete civilization. A porch is more than a mere extension of a house in wood or stone or brick . It is an expansion of the soul in terms of beauty and light and breadth of view . How different is the life lived on the porch from that suffered in a connecting series of little dark closets in the city, where the rooms are so small that they are but the outer shell of the tenant, who feels undressed when he steps out into the street! Man was made for the wide spaces of field and sky, not for prisoning cells. Inside four walls man's powers are contracted, but on a porch with outlook to the sun, the stars, the wide open, they are expanded infinitely.

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### THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

from the IA etext of People You Know (1923)  
by Harold Stark

Having written up this conversation, the next afternoon Young Boswell took a subway train to Park Row, the street of the printing press. That was in November, and there have been many changes since then. The old red brick atrocity which Richard Hunt built on the eastern side of the square, no longer vibrates with the type-setting machine. The Tribune has moved up town and is housed in a new model factory for the efficient production of news.

Young Boswell, nervous, tired, hungry, yet too excited to eat, emerged from the stuffy subway station into City Hall Park. The blue light of a November evening, intense, dreamlike, the color of old glass, lighted the little square. The Woolworth Building towered white against the faint last glory of the setting sun. The copper rays set ablaze the tarnished

dome of the World.

The windows of the Tribune Building were lighted brightly that evening. The awkward tower, where the editor once had his offices, seemed to symbolize Young Boswell's ambition. He had heard that the present editor was a Princebridge man, interested in developing younger men into good journalists. It was he who had first published Sir James Barrie's "Courage" in the editorial columns of the Tribune.

So, courageously, his first interview folded neatly in his pocket, Young Boswell mounted the marble steps and gave his card to the attendant at the door. She disappeared through a wooden gate.

He had never been in a newspaper office before.

Through the door he could see young men and old bending over typewriters or rapidly walking about.

There were women reporters, too, tired girls who subsisted on the assignments men wouldn't do.

The attendant came back and admitted Young Boswell through the wooden gate. He had come at last into the secret penetralia of the great-god-News. He was introduced to the editor's secretary.

"It is the wrong time to come," she told him. "Mr. Mason always holds a conference with the staff at five. Won't you come back another day?"

Young Boswell's heart stopped beating, as he foresaw defeat. "Courage," he kept saying to himself, "Courage." He must have looked pathetic, crest-fallen, his hope gone, for at that moment, a very dark man of medium height, faultlessly dressed, appeared in the doorway. He was smoking a cigarette in a white paper holder. He walked the length of the noisy room and stood before Young Boswell.

Julian Mason—Did you want to see me?

Young Boswell—Yes, sir.

Julian Mason—I'm sorry, but I can't see you now. I'm busy. Can't you come some other time?

Young Boswell (desperately)—May I have one minute of your time? Just one?

The editor nodded. He held the empty cigarette holder between his teeth and pulled at it with one hand, a habit Young Boswell later copied. He listened attentively as the young man laid before him his plan, in one long breath. Young Boswell had never talked so rapidly or so well before. It must have been that enthusiasm which caused the editor to say, "Give me your article and I shall read it. Come back another time when we can talk things over."

Young Boswell—When? Are you here in the evening? Could I return after dinner tonight?  
Julian Mason—You might try then. I must go.  
(And he returned to his conference.)

Young Boswell found his way again to the Park. He watched the workers emerge from the huge office buildings and crowd into the subway. The entrance was like the maw of some great beast swallowing men and women in pleased gulps. Young Boswell was filled with some unknown new joy. He forgot for the moment that there were only thirty-five cents remaining of his patrimony. He jingled them arrogantly in his pocket. He followed the crowd onto the Brooklyn Bridge, walking slowly out to the center span. He watched the tugs file by with their cargoes, far below. The lights on the river blinked like fireflies, and the rising buildings reminded him of a magic city in the sea. Nothing was real. It was all a dream. He stood there alone by the railing, wondering what the winter would bring. A clock struck nine. It had grown quite dark and a biting wind blew off the river. He drew his coat collar tight about his throat and walked, almost ran, to the editor's office. He had to wait, but was ultimately ushered in.

Julian Mason (pulling at the empty cigarette holder)—Do sit down. (Young Boswell perched on the edge of a chair by the desk, littered with important papers, cuttings, notes, letters to be signed.) I have read your article. I showed it to Percy Hammond and to others of the staff. What is your idea?

Young Boswell—To write one each day . . . a kind



of column.

Julian Mason—Well, I like this one and I want you to bring me others. I am going to try you out. Something that strangely resembled his heart jumped around inside Young Boswell and the room swam in several directions.

Julian Mason—Now tell me all about yourself.

Young Boswell suppressed his joy for the moment. He told this man, who was later to become his friend and employer, all the story of himself. His childhood in the Middle West. His days at school and at Prince bridge, his year abroad, his dreams of the coming winter. The editor sat quietly looking at him with searching black eyes, the eyes of a man who believed in youth, who was young himself, who saw possibilities where other men saw only the inexperience of youth. When Young Boswell had finished Mr. Mason opened a desk drawer, took out a white paper holder, gave it to Young Boswell and they lighted cigarettes.

Julian Mason—I hope you don't mind my asking, but how much money have you?

Young Boswell (embarrassed)—Do you really want to know? (The editor nodded.) Thirty-five cents, sir.

Then the editor gave Young Boswell a green note of a certain denomination. Saying goodnight, he returned to the kitchen, clasping the first money he had ever earned in his pocket.

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## THE INFORMER (1925)

by Liam O'Flaherty  
from the IA etext

He wanted to let his left hand fly out and hit her in the jaw . One slight blow would make her senseless . But he had never struck a woman , owing to some obscure prejudice or other . Still, he was terribly tired of her. Now that he had this money on his person, without as yet having decided what to do

with it , he wanted to be free from her .

“ You shut up ,” he cried angrily , “ or I'll fix ye. Haven 't I given ye a drink ? ” Then he added half heartedly : “ D 'ye want another drink ?”

Katie was still staring at him . Suddenly a change came over her. Something suggested itself to her peculiar reason and she changed her attitude.

“ Don 't mind what I said now , Gypo,” she continued in a low mournful voice , looking at the ground with hanging lower lip , like a person overwhelmed and utterly defeated by some persistent calamity .

“God Almighty , the world is so hard that a person loses her mind altogether. Misery, misery, misery an ' nothin ' but misery. Your as bad off as mesel', Gypo, so ye know what I mane. No man has pity on us. Every hand is agin us because we have got nothin ' . Why is that, will ye tell me, Gypo ? Is God Himself agin us too ? Ha, ha , o' course we were both of us Communists and members o ' the Revolutionary Organization, so we know there's no God. But supposin ' there was a God, what the hell is He doin ' - ”

“ Katie,” cried Gypo angrily , “ none o ' that talk . Lave God alone.”

“ God forgive me, yer right,” cried Katie, beginning to sob . But she pulled herself together suddenly with surprising speed and turned to Gypo almost sharply . Her eyes narrowed slightly and a quaint weird smile lit up her face. There was a trace of beauty in her face under the influence of the smile, a trace of beauty and merriment. “ Tell us where ye got all the money, Gypo. Ye had none this mornin ' .”

Gypo started in spite of himself and glanced at her in terror. He struggled violently , trying to formulate an excuse for his sudden wealth . He fumed within himself for not having made a plan . Unconsciously he cursed McPhillip , whom he had sent to his death , for not having made a plan. He looked at Katie with glaring eyes and open lips. Then he bent towards her, tried to speak and said nothing. But she misunderstood him .

“ Ya,” she said , “ I knew ye were yellow . Have ye robbed a church or what, an' are ye afraid ofbein '

turned into a goat be the priests ? ”

" Shut up," he hissed suddenly , gripping at the word " robbery ” and hooking a plan on to it .

It was a customary word, a friendly thing that he recognized, with which he felt at home. He bent down, with quivering face , eager to hurl out the words of his plan before he could forget them again . " It wasn 't a church. It was a sailor off an American ship . I went through him at the back o ' Cassidy's pub in Jerome Street. But if ye say a word ye know what yer goin ' to get.”

" Who ? Me? ” Katie laughed out loud and looked at him with emphatic scorn over her shoulder .

“ What d'ye take me for? An informer or what? ”

" Who's an informer ? ” cried Gypo, gripping her right knee with his left hand. The huge hand closed about the thin frail knee and immediately the whole leg went rigid . Katie 's whole body shrivelled at the mere touch of the vast strength.

There was silence for a second. Gypo stared at Katie with a look of ignorant fear on his face. The word had terrified and infuriated him . It was the first time he had heard it uttered in the new sense that it now held for him . Katie, hypnotized by the face, panted and looked back at him .

“ What are ye talkin ' about informin ' for?”

panted Gypo again , tightening his grip on her knee. He had not meant to hurt. He merely wanted to give emphasis to his words.

" Lemme go,” screamed Katie , unable to endure the pain any longer and terrified by the look in Gypo's face and by his strange behaviour.

Gypo let go immediately . The barman came striding over , wiping his hands in his apron . He pointed toward the door. Gypo got to his feet and stared at the barman, glad to have a man in front of him , against whom he could vent his ignorant rage.

He lowered his head and he was about to rush forward when Katie hung on to him and cried out.

" Come on , Gypo," she cried rapidly , " let's get out of here . Let him alone, Barney. He's got a few pints on him . He didn 't mane any harm . Come on , kid ."

Gypo allowed himself to be dragged out back

wards by the right hand into the street. They stood together on the kerbstone, with Katie 's arm entwined in his .

“ Come on up to Biddy Burke's place ,” she whispered in a friendly tone. " Come on up .”

In front stretched a main road, brilliantly lighted and thronged with people. The light, the people , the suggestion of gaiety and of freedom attracted Gypo. To the rear stretched a dark , evil-smelling lane. It repelled him . There was where Katie wanted to bring him , down towards the slum district and the brothel quarter . Down there were his own haunts, people who knew him . He feared the darkness , the lurking shadows, the suggestion of men hiding in alleyways to attack him . Out there in front he could wander off, among strange people who 'did not care a straw about informers.

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## THE TRAVELLERS

from the text of THE LORD OF LABRAZ, by Pio Baroja

They went towards it, going up by a steep path thick with stones. It was a hermitage with its court. Close by ran the high road.

“We are in the Valley,” said the woman. “I will pray here for an instant.”

“As you please.”

The woman, with the help of her companion, dismounted with difficulty, resting her foot on a bench near the hermitage, and knelt down in the porch. At its further end through a small barred window an altar was lit by a rushlight swimming in a saucer of oil. A very sad-faced Christ with a shock of hair half covering the face and dressed in a skirt of black velvet, hung from a cross. While the woman was praying, the man dismounted, wrapped his cloak closely round him and considered the hermitage with an air of indifference. It was a whitewashed chapel, its tiles were secured by large stones, and its bell supported on a framework of iron. It was built against a ruined convent, of which only four walls remained. In one of these walls was a broken worm-eaten door, and above it a flat stone with a

carving of the emblems of death: skull, cross-bones and cross. Above this stone, in order to emphasize the idea of death, a human skull had been embedded in the wall between four bricks. The man smiled mockingly at these mournful emblems and looked through a crack in the door. One could see a small cemetery lit by the light of the moon; a few broken sticks, remains of crosses, rested on the weeds and brambles; a few white stones appeared among the weeds.

He walked round the ruins of the convent and came back to the hermitage.

“Shall we go on?”

“When you please.”

He assisted the woman to mount, mounted himself, and they rode on along the highway. From the hermitage ran a line of stone crosses, mostly without transverse limbs. They passed through a village, two or three houses by the side of the road; half an hour later they passed a second. A few lights appeared above them.

“Are those the lights of Labraz?” asked the man.

“Yes, I think so.”

They were now near the town. They could vaguely distinguish a black mass of walls and roofs, among which dark tall towers stood out with their belfries resembling black arms. Thick clouds scudded across the sky, and the mass of houses surrounded by their wall would now appear in the light of the moon, now sink back into the darkness of the night.

“I begin to remember it all, as if I had never left it,” said the man. “Isn’t this the Hornabeque?”

“Yes.”

“It was an avenue of tall trees near the wall against a broad bastion. We used to play as children on those cannon,” he said, pointing out a few set on old guns on either side. “Let us hurry,” said the man; “the gate is open.”

An arch lit by a faint lantern appeared embedded in the wall. The traveller urged his horse to a trot and approached the gate. The watchman was about to shut it when he pressed forward and shouted: “One moment.”

The woman came up and the two travellers passed through the gate, crossed a narrow passage and entered the town.

The street ascended steeply. It began in small houses and hovels but presently came to taller houses. They were soon

in the square. The tower of the collegiate church appeared in a street above, tall and black like a gigantic sentinel among a mass of roofs.

“We have arrived,” murmured the woman, in a voice even fainter than before.

“We will rest here a little,” answered the man. And in front of a house which stood on an arcade they reined in their horses.

## II

When I left London (I’m a Kentish man by birth, though) and took that sitivation here, I quite made up my mind that it was the dullest little out-of-the-way corner in England, and that there would be some credit in being jolly under such circumstances.

—Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

THE corner-house of two streets, the Calle de Jesus, running from the Puerta Nueva to the Plaza Mayor, and the Cuesta del Patriarca, was the inn of the Goya. It was a large ancient house, of stone up to the first floor and after that of brick. On the side of the square it looked on to the arcades, and it was here that was the shop which served as tavern, wine-shop, grocer and ironmonger. On the Calle de Jesus side the house had a wide entrance for carts in the form of an arch, and above this was a broad porch supported on columns of brick with bases of stone. The peasants who came up to Labraz by the Calle de Jesus from the neighbouring villages, called the house the inn of the porch. This detail was sufficient in itself to distinguish an inhabitant of Labraz from other persons, as one might say a Greek from a barbarian: the inhabitant of Labraz spoke of the inn of the Goya, the peasant of the neighbourhood spoke of the inn of the porch. The dining-room of the inn and the shop formed the casino of the town; in the afternoons and evenings the principal inhabitants of the lower part of the town took their coffee there, or at least something which was called coffee and which might not be good but was certainly cheap. From nightfall to half past nine or ten at night the schoolmaster, two attorneys, an usurer, the surgeon Don Tomas and one or two others assembled there. Some played at mus, with worn and greasy cards, raining blows on the table and conquering gradually a pile of white or red beans, which were afterwards exchanged for farthings. Other

card-players preferred tute or brisca; the more aristocratic devoted themselves to ombre or quadrille; the meaner sort showed a predilection for mus, guifote and ganapierde, while the gamblers went in for timba, siete y medio or trente-et-un and the misanthropic played patience.

The surgeon Don Tomas, who lived in the square, used to go every evening to the shop, take up a newspaper to which the Goya subscribed, put on his spectacles and bury himself so deep in the reading of the news that it was useless to ask him a question, for he paid no attention. Besides the card-players, the devotees of Bacchus and those whose purpose was to learn the political news, which were then important, there were others, mostly young men, although there were a few exceptions, who paid tribute to Venus in the persons of Blanca and Marina, the two daughters of the hostess Goya. In the hands of the Goya the inn was a paying concern. She had been romantic in her youth, and there had been much talk about her love affairs with young men of good family belonging to the upper part of the town, at the time of the first civil war.

As a result of the gossip concerning her the Goya at twenty-five seemed destined to remain unwed, when her father, who owned the tavern, arranged her marriage with a young Basque servant of the house who was sufficiently philosophical to despise the pomp and vanity of this world, to pay no heed to the talk of the town and to marry the Goya. Domingo Chiqui, for by his Christian name and his nickname was he known, offended during many years the chivalrous sentiments of the city of Labraz. He was no longer very young when he married, short rather than tall, merry and addicted to lying, and when it was a question of work, as light as a bar of lead; as to his appetite, it was bottomless, like the fabled jar of the Danaides. His nose was long and hooked, and an Adam's apple rose from his throat like another crook desperately anxious to join his nose.

Domingo Chiqui was a man given to fantastic ideas. He had solved the problem of how to live without working, a fact which was to him an unending source of enthusiasm and joviality, so that, when he met a countryman of his own kidney, who seemed to him as careless and gay as he was himself, he would relate to him in Basque the Odyssey of his good fortune, interrupting his story at every moment with a snuffling laugh or strange hoarse sounds in his throat. Domingo Chiqui spoke Spanish fairly well, and only

made a Basque hash of the genders when for some reason he was obliged to express himself more rapidly than was his wont. The fantastic ideas of Domingo Chiqui were evident both in his conversation and in the account-books in which in a large rough hand he entered in blue ink the household expenses and the straw and barley of the muleteers. Domingo Chiqui called the inhabitants of Labraz, and, generally speaking, all who spoke Spanish, Belarri mochas, which in Basque means Shortears, and this word must have had more meanings for him than has the Bible, for he would utter it now sarcastically, now with disdain or irony, making hoarse sounds and winking his eyes. If a French organ-grinder passed through the town he would have him in and those who frequented the tavern would thus hear airs from La Favorita, Marta and other romantic tunes. In the town the inn of the Goya had the bad reputation of harbouring Liberals, and this was due to the frequent presence there of Perico Armentia. Perico was one of the Liberals of the town. To be Liberal meant for him to be gruff and outspoken. He owned a plot of land and a vineyard which yielded him a bare sustenance, and he spent his 'days in amazing the town. His moustache was of an alarming size, and he wore his hair long; his suits were too large for him, he wore a large hat and carried a huge stick. Another friend of Domingo Chiqui and of Perico was the baker, who owned an oven in the square opposite the inn. He would appear at the door of the inn in his vest after crossing the square with breast and arms bare, even in the depth of winter. He greeted mine host with a "Well Domingo?" and Domingo Chiqui always had some witty remark ready for his benefit; the baker would laugh heartily, and they would converse for a few minutes: "I have left my sisters at work kneading; in a moment I must go to bake."

But Domingo's most constant friend was a fellow countryman who owned a set of ninepins. He was of a very sad and serious turn of mind, spoke very little, and in a disdainful indifferent tone. He seemed to be got up in disguise; anyone would have thought his beard was false. He wore light-coloured suits and marvellous hats; and this, added to his serious mysterious appearance gave him the air of a conspirator about to take part in some tremendous plot. The owner of the ninepins seemed bound to levy a daily tribute of a certain number of glasses of wine, and he



stayed there until he had done so, to the despair of the Goya.  
When the gloomy man spoke, it was only to make a bet  
without rhyme or reason. Someone would say: "Perico  
has bought a four-year mule, and it has cost him twelve  
pounds." "Not he!" would say the man of the ninepins.  
"He hasn't?"  
"The price was not twelve pounds,...



Pio Baroja

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*And Nobody Came*  
from the Project Gutenberg eBook of  
The Seven Stairs, (1962) by Stuart Brent

I might as well tell you what this book is about.

Years ago I started to write a memoir about a young fellow who wanted to be a book dealer and how he made out. I tore it up when I discovered the subject had already been covered by a humorist named Will Cuppy in a book called, *\_How to Become Extinct\_*.

Now I'm not so sure. I'm still around in my middle-aged obsolescence and all about us the young are withering on the vine. Civilization may beat me yet in achieving the state of the dodo. The tragedy is that so few seem to know or really believe it. Maybe there just isn't enough innocence left to join with the howl of the stricken book dealer upon barging into the trap. Not just a howl of self-pity, but the yap of the human spirit determined to assert itself no matter what. There's some juice in that spirit yet, or there would be no point in submitting the following pages as supporting evidence—hopefully, or bitterly, or both.

Let there be no doubt about my original qualifications for the role of Candide. With three hundred dollars worth of books (barely enough to fill five shelves), a used record player, and some old recordings (left in my apartment when I went into the army and still there upon my return), I opened the Seven Stairs Book and Record Shop on the Near North Side of Chicago.

The shop was located in one of the old brownstone, converted residences still remaining on Rush Street—a fashionable townhouse district in the era after the Great Chicago Fire, now the kind of a district into which fashionable townhouses inevitably decline. One had to climb a short flight of stairs above an English basement (I thought there were seven steps—in reality there were eight), pass through a short, dark hall, and unlock a door with a dime store skeleton key before entering finally into the prospective shop. It was mid-August of 1946 when I first stood there in the barren room. The sun had beaten in all day and I gasped for air; and gasping, I stood wondering if this was to be the beginning of a new life and an end to the hit-or-miss of neither success nor failure that summed up my career to the moment.

It all fitted my mood perfectly: the holes in the plaster, the ripped molding, the 1890 light fixture that hung by blackened chains from the ceiling, the wood-burning fireplace, the worn floor, the general air of decay lurking in every corner. Long before the scene registered fully upon my mind, it had entered into my emotions. I saw everything and forgave everything. It could all be repaired, painted, cleaned—set right with a little work. I saw the little room filled with books and records, a fire going, and myself in a velvet jacket, seated behind a desk, being charming and gracious to everyone who came in.

I saw success, excitement, adventure, in the world I loved—the world of books and music. I saw fine people coming and going—beautiful women and handsome men. I saw myself surrounded by warmth, friendship and good feeling, playing my favorite recordings all day, telling my favorite stories, finding myself.

I ran my fingers over the mantelpiece. “I want this room,” I said to myself. “I want it.”

I built shelves to the ceiling and bought all the books I could buy. There was no money left to buy the velvet jacket. Every morning I opened the store bright and early. Every night I closed very late. And no one came to visit me. Morning, noon, and night it was the same. I was alone

with my books and my music. Everything was so bright, so shiny, so clean. And the books! There were not very many, but they were all so good! Still nobody came.

How do you go about getting people to buy books? I didn't know. I had been a teacher before the war. My father was not a business man either, nor his father. No one in my family knew anything about business. I knew the very least.

Every morning I walked into the shop freshly determined: today I will sell a book! I hurried with my housekeeping. And then, what to do? Phone a friend or a relative. I couldn't think of a relative who read or a friend who wouldn't see through the thin disguise of my casual greeting and understand the ulterior purpose of my call.

One late afternoon it happened. One of the beautiful people I had dreamed about \_came in\_.

She stood on the threshold, apparently debating whether it was safe to venture further. "Is this a bookstore?" she said.

"Please come in," I said. "It's a bookshop."

She was solidly built and had a round face above a heavy neck with the fat comfortably overlapping the collar of her white dress. Her legs were sturdy, her feet were spread in a firm stance, she was fat and strong and daring.

"Do you have a copy of \_Peace of Mind\_?" said my daring first customer.

Everyone was reading the rabbi's book that summer—except me. It was a bestseller; naturally I wouldn't touch it. But here was a customer!

"Lady," I said, opening my business career on a note of total capitulation, "if you'll wait here a moment, I'll get the book for you." She nodded.

"Please," I added, running out the door.

I sprinted four blocks to A. C. McClurg's, the wholesaler from whom I bought my original three hundred dollars' worth of books, and bought a single copy of \_Peace of Mind\_ for \$1.62. Then I ran back to complete my first sale for \$2.50.

The realization overwhelmed me that I was totally unprepared to sell a book. I had no bags or wrapping paper. I had no cash register or even a cigar box. It seemed highly improper to accept money and then reach into my pocket for change. It was a long time, in fact, before I could get over the embarrassment of taking anyone's money at all. I found it very upsetting.

2

“Read Your Lease. Goodbye.”

The near North Side of Chicago is a Greenwich Village, a slum, and a night life strip bordered by the commerce of Michigan Boulevard and the Gold Coast homes and apartments of the wealthy.

Into a narrow trough between the down-and-out losers of Clark Street and the luxurious livers of Lake Shore Drive flows a stream of life that has no direction, organization, or established pattern. Here are attracted the inner-directed ones struggling with their own visions, along with the hangers-on, the disenchanted and emotionally bankrupt. It is a haven for the broken soul as well as the earnest and rebellious. The drug addict, the petty thief, the sex deviant and the alcoholic are generously mixed in among the sincere and aspiring. There are the dislocated wealthy, the connivers and parasites, abortionists and pimps. There are call girls and crowds of visiting firemen, second hand clothing stores and smart shops, pawn brokers and art supply stores.

Gertrude Stein once wrote about Picasso's reply to a young man who was seeking advice on the best location for opening a Parisian bookstore: “I would just find a place and start selling books.” Well, I found a place, uniquely unfavored as a crossroads of commerce (during the day, virtually no one was on the street), but teeming with the malcontents, the broken, the battered—the flotsam and jetsam of urban life, along with inspired or aspiring prophets, musicians, artists, and writers. What more could one ask?

The original dimensions of the Seven Stairs were fifteen feet by nine feet. A single bay window looked onto Rush Street. At the other end of the room stood a small sink. The bathroom was on the second floor and seldom worked. Three ashcans on the sidewalk by my window served the building for garbage disposal. Occasionally the city emptied them.

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The Dragon in Shallow Waters, by Vita Sackville-West  
a PG Etext.

"...I don't speak to him much, he's always in his books. I wish you lived in the house, Mr. Calthorpe."

"I wish I did, Nan." But on the whole, he thought, he was glad he didn't.

#### IV

Morgan, whom Nan represented as being always in his books, was by inclination a scientist, but for the moment, until he had the means to devote himself to his profession, he managed that branch of the factory concerned with scents and powders.

He worked among shining alembics and great-bellied bottles of dark green glass, standing round his room in rows.

The latticed window was hung with cobwebs. The table was littered with bottles, saucepans, test-tubes, and little flames burning. Of all things in the room, the alembics alone were kept clean, gleaming bright brass globes, pair by pair, connected by twisting pipes, and ever dripping the distilled, overpowering scent into dishes put ready to receive it. They shone out from the disorder of the room. Canisters ranged round the walls on shelves: benzoin, civet, frankincense, ambergris,—the names on the labels smouldered as a group of Asiatics among ordinary people.

Nan was sent up with a message to him in this room.

She appeared in the doorway, continuing to knock as she pushed open the door, in the bright blue overall she wore when at her work. She was smiling shyly, as though she expected a welcome. But he did not immediately see her. He was bending with great absorption over a little pair of scales, weighing a quantity of grains, and when he had done this he poured the grains very carefully into a kind of box, which he set above a small lamp to heat. Then as he wiped his hands on a piece of linen, he caught sight of her.

"Mrs. Dene! What brings you here? what bit of luck? What extraordinary

bit of luck?"

He went to her, drew her into the room, and shut the door. He gazed at her with incredulous delight. He wanted to touch her, to make sure that she was real.

"Why don't you tell me?" he queried, as she stood there smiling but not speaking.

As she delivered her message, every word seemed to give birth to an unspoken, irrelevant flight of words that fluttered round them with ghostly rustle of wings, finding no resting-place. When she had finished, she stood irresolute.

"I must go back."

Her eyes roamed over the room, and every now and then swept over him in passing. They caressed him in that quick, diffident, gentle way she had. They rested with a mild dismay on all his disorder, and a pucker of trouble appeared between her brows.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Dene?"

"Oh, your things want straightening," she murmured in tones of distress. "Doesn't any one have charge of your room? The dust,—look at it! The litter!"

She moved to his table as though her deft hands were yearning towards it. She made little tentative touches at his things, while he watched her. She looked at him to see whether she was annoying him.

"Oh, do you mind?"

"On the contrary, I like to see you doing it."

She gained courage.

"You haven't a duster, have you?"

He discovered a duster in the table drawer and gave it to her; like all good workmen, she was heartened by the touch of an instrument, however humble, of her natural work. She picked things up and set them down more briskly, saying meanwhile, half in excuse for her briskness,—

“I must hurry, or they’ll be missing me downstairs.”

“You can say I kept you. I’ll find something for you to take to the forewoman; that’ll be an excuse.”

“An excuse—is that right, do you think? But your room \_is\_ in a mess, isn’t it? It can’t have been touched for months. Does no one clean up?”

“No, I won’t let them.”

“You ought to have told me,” she said, greatly distressed. “I am so sorry ... I didn’t think. Some men are like that, I know. They think they can find things better. But I haven’t tidied; look, nothing has been moved.”

“I told you I liked to see you doing it.”

“You were civil,” she said, not comforted.

“No, I’m never civil.”

“Oh yes, Mr. Morgan; you can’t help it, if you’re civil in your heart. It comes kindly, to folk who laugh as much as you do.”

“You laugh too; I’ve heard you laughing downstairs, in the workroom. You and I laugh more than Silas and Gregory.”

“Gregory can’t laugh,” she said gravely.

For a moment their chatter stopped quite short. Then she began again,—

“I must go now, Mr. Morgan.”

“No, stay; you shall look at some of my things,” he cried, making a movement to detain her. “These are the alembics where the scent is distilled,” he went on; “of course, these are only the small ones that I use for my own experiments; I expect you’ve seen the big ones in the shed downstairs.

“The shed all littered with sandal-wood shavings? I like it; it smells good.”

“It smells good here in my room too, don’t you think? That’s because of the scent dripping from the alembics. You see it drips into these

pannikins that are put there to catch it. They are all new scents—new combinations of scents, that is—that I’m trying.” He was eager, both for the sake of his work and in his anxiety to hold her interest. “Now I’ll show you some of the raw material; it doesn’t always smell good before we’ve been to work upon it.”

He wondered whether he might take her arm, whether he might venture. She was like the little bird to which he always compared her, and as easily scared! He turned the question over and over in his mind while he was talking, now bracing himself to be bold, now shrinking back; almost moving towards her; but while hesitation still swirled within his mind he found that his hand had, quite simply, taken hers. “It’s so natural, so fitting, for me to take her hand, that she hasn’t even noticed,” he thought with joy.

“These are the canisters where I keep my raw stuff,” he said, pointing to the tin canisters ranged on shelves. They stood hand in hand reading the names on the labels.

“Ambergris—that’s the name of a scent I bottle,” she said, with a little laugh. “I use a lavender ribbon for that. And orris—that’s the powder. Don’t they have queer names? Opoponax, that always makes me laugh.”

They laughed together over opoponax.

“And there’s names out of Scripture,” she said, “frankincense and myrrh.”

He took down the tin of benzoin, and made her smell it, shaking some of the brittle stuff into the palm of her hand; crumbling up her hand into a cup, and guiding it now to her nose and now to his own. They compared their tastes; “I think this sort smells nicest,” she said to him, gravely holding out her cupped hand, but he would not agree, after bending over it with the deliberation of a practised critic, and added a little storax, which, he said, brought out the pungency of the benzoin.

“All these gums and resins,” he said, “come from trees; you cut a gash in the tree, and the gum comes from it like blood from a wound, oozing out. And one of them—labdanum—is got by the natives by beating the bush with long whips; or sometimes they get it by combing the beards of the goats which have been browsing off the bush.”

That made her laugh too, but she was impressed by his knowledge, and that made him laugh in his turn.



“Now I’ll show you the woods,—you said you liked the sandal-wood; well; this is cedar, don’t you like that even better? Shall I give you some to take away in a little packet? you can keep it with your clothes, like the sachets you tie up downstairs.” He thought with a momentary panic that he might have offended her by referring to her clothes, but the hint of intimacy in the suggestion pleased and troubled him so much that he was glad he had taken the risk for the sake of that pleasure.

She was not offended; she only blushed a little.

“That will be nice,—but I’m taking all your time, Mr. Morgan.”

“Oh no; I have plenty of time, and there’s lots more that I could show you. I could tell you a good deal, too, that might amuse you: how the Egyptians used to embalm their mummies, and how an Assyrian king caused himself to be burnt with all his wives on a high pyre of scented boughs sooner than fall into the hands of an enemy. And how the Chinese hunt for musk; this is musk; it doesn’t smell nice in this state, but it’s very precious. This is attar of roses in this little bottle; smell very carefully. Let me hold it for you. Do you like my things?”

She liked his things very much.

“Do you think my room less untidy and dusty, now that you know there are other things in it besides dust and untidiness?”

“All those tins, full of sweet scents,” she said unexpectedly. “Only, I ought to go back to my work now, don’t you think? You said you would give me something to take to the forewoman.”

“But you said that wasn’t right.”

“No, perhaps it isn’t,—Oh, I see: you’re teasing me. Well, I’ll go without it.”

“But you’re frightened of being scolded?” he said, following her and laying his hand upon the handle of the door. “Now aren’t you? confess! What do you say when the forewoman is cross? Do you stand hanging your head and twisting your apron?” He was laughing down at her.

“She isn’t often cross, but she will be if I stay dawdling here,—oh, \_please\_, Mr. Morgan!”

He saw with astonishment that her eyes were suddenly brimming with tears, and her soft mouth quivered.

“You are dreadfully unkind, getting me into trouble and then teasing me about it,” she said, nearly crying, but trying to conceal it from him.

“I enjoyed looking at the scents, and I forgot the time, but now it is all different, and I want to go away, please. Please take your hand off the door-handle,” she continued, trying to pull away his fingers with her weak ones.

“Why, you have got quite excited,” he said gently; “look, I am not keeping you—I have let go of the handle—but won’t you wait while I write a note to the forewoman? I want to send her a message, I really do! Won’t you wait for it?”

“Of course, if you ask me as one of the girls, I must.”

“You’re terribly perverse!” he exclaimed, half annoyed.

“If you ask me as one of the girls....”

“Very well; Nan, will you please wait a minute while I write a note for you to take to Miss Dawson?” He was not sure to what extent she was serious or joking. Then she flushed at his use of her name, but he saw that she was not joking at all. “What a strange, perplexing thing!” he commented inwardly, as he searched for a pencil among the litter on his table.

“If you’re looking for your pencil, I put it in the tray with your measure and the little thermometer,” she volunteered sulkily.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say, “You said you hadn’t tidied!” but a glance at her face, which was still quivering with her aroused sensitiveness, warned him not to tease her. He sat down and wrote his note while she waited over by the door, then he brought it across to her.

“Have we quarrelled?” he said wistfully.

“Is there no message with the note?”

“How severe you are!” He held the note just out of her reach, risking her anger if he might keep her a moment longer. “Have you got the packet of cedar-dust I gave you?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

She made one of the patch-pockets on her overall gape, and let him see the packet within. He gave her the note reluctantly, and opened the door for her.

“Good-bye, Mr. Necromancer, with your alembics,” she said.

“Stop! where did you get that big word?”

“Out of a book.”

He could think of nothing to say but “What book?” in order to delay her, but she was already half-way down the passage. He watched her till she was out of sight, then returned to his room and shut the door. “She’s like a little delicate moth flitting through gross life,” he thought, and he wandered about his room, touching the things which had taken her fancy most.

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